SALMAGUNDI;

OR, THE

WHIM-WHAMS AND OPINIONS

OF

LAUNCELOT LANGSTAFF, ESQ.

AND OTHERS.

In hoc est hoax, cum quiz et jokesez,
Et smokem, toastem, roastem folksez,
Fee, faw, fum. *Psalmanazar.*

With baked, and broiled, and stewed, and toasted,
And fried, and boiled, and smoked, and roasted,
We treat the town.

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THE LITTLE MAN IN BLACK.

BY LAUNCELOT LANGSTAFF, ESQ.

The following story has been handed down by family tradition for more than a century. It is one on which my cousin Christopher dwells with more than usual prolixity; and, being in some measure connected with a personage often quoted in our work, I have thought it worthy of being laid before my readers.

Soon after my grandfather, mr. Lemuel Cockloft, had quietly settled himself at the hall, and just about the time that the gossips of the neighbourhood, tired of prying into his affairs, were anxious for some new tea-table topick, the busy community of our little village was thrown into a grand turmoil of curiosity and conjecture; (a situation very common to

little gossiping villages) by the sudden and unaccountable appearance of a mysterious individual.

The object of this solicitude was a little black looking man of a foreign aspect, who took possession of an old building, which having long had the reputation of being haunted, was in a state of ruinous desolation, and an object of fear to all true believers in ghosts. He usually wore a high sugar-loaf hat, with a narrow brim, and a little black cloak, which, short as he was, scarcely reached below his knees. He sought no intimacy or acquaintance with any one; appeared to take no interest in the pleasures or the little broils of the village, nor ever talked; except sometimes to himself in an outlandish tongue. He commonly carried a large book, covered with sheepskin, under his arm; appeared always to be lost in meditation, and was often met by the peasantry, sometimes watching the dawning of day, sometimes at noon seated under a tree poring over his volume, and sometimes at evening, gazing with a look of sober tranquility at the sun as it gradually sunk below the horizon.

The good people of the vicinity beheld something prodigiously singular in all this—a profound mystery seemed to hang about the stranger, which, with all their sagacity they could not penetrate, and in the excess of worldly charity they pronounced it a sure sign "that he was no better than he should be"—a phrase innocent enough in itself, but which, as applied in common, signifies nearly every thing that is bad. The young people thought him a gloomy misanthrope, because he never joined in their sports—the old men thought still more hardly of him, because he followed no trade, nor ever seemed ambitious of earning a farthing—and

as to the old gossips, baffled by the inflexible taciturnity of the stranger, they unanimously decreed that a man who could not or would not talk, was no better than a dumb beast. The little man in black, careless of their opinions, seemed resolved to maintain the liberty of keeping his own secret; and the consequence was that, in a little while, the whole village was in an uproar— for in little communities of this description, the members have always the privilege of being thoroughly versed, and even of meddling in all the affairs of each other.

A confidential conference was held one Sunday morning after sermon, at the door of the village church, and the character of the unknown fully investigated. The schoolmaster gave as his opinion that he was the wandering Jew—the sexton was certain that he must be a free-mason from his silence—a third maintained, with great obstinacy, that he was a high german doctor, and that the book which he carried about with him, contained the secrets of the black art; but the most prevailing opinion seemed to be that he was a *witch*—a race of beings at that time abounding in those parts; and a sagacious old matron from Connecticut proposed to ascertain the fact by sousing him into a kettle of hot water.

Suspicion, when once afloat, goes with wind and tide, and soon becomes certainty. Many a stormy night was the little man in black seen by the flashes of lightening, frisking and curveting in the air upon a broomstick; and it was always observed that at those times the storm did more mischief than at any other. The old lady in particular, who suggested the humane ordeal of the boiling kettle, lost on one of these occasions a fine brindled cow; which

accident was entirely ascribed to the vengeance of the little man in black. If ever a mischievous hireling rode his master's favourite horse to a distant frolick, and the animal was observed to be lame and jaded in the morning—the little man in black was sure to be at the bottom of the affair; nor could a high wind howl through the village at night, but the old women shrugged up their shoulders and observed "the little man in black was in his *tantrums*." In short he became the bugbear of every house, and was as effectual in frightening little children into obedience and hystericks, as the redoubtable Rawhead-and-bloody-bones himself; nor could a housewife of the village sleep in peace, except under the guardianship of a horse-shoe nailed to the door.

The object of these direful suspicions remained for some time totally ignorant of the wonderful quandary he had occasioned, but he was soon doomed to feel its effects An individual who is once so unfortunate as to incur the odium of a village, is in a great measure outlawed and proscribed; and becomes a mark for injury and insult—particularly if he has not the power or the disposition to recriminate. The little venomous passions, which in the great world are dissipated and weakened by being widely diffused, act in the narrow limits of a country town with collected vigour, and become rancorous in proportion as they are confined in their sphere of action. The little man in black experienced the truth of this—every mischievous urchin returning from school, had full liberty to break his windows; and this was considered as a most daring exploit, for, in such awe did they stand of him, that the most adventurous schoolboy was never seen to approach his threshold, and at night would prefer going

round by the cross-roads, where a traveller had been murdered by the indians, rather than pass by the door of his forlorn habitation.

The only living creature that seemed to have any care or affection for this deserted being, was an old turnspit—the companion of his lonely mansion and his solitary wanderings—the sharer of his scanty meals, and, sorry am I to say it—the sharer of his persecutions. The turnspit, like his master, was peaceable and inoffensive; never known to bark at a horse, to growl at a traveller, or to quarrel with the dogs of the neighbourhood. He followed close at his master's heels when he went out, and when he returned stretched himself in the sunbeams at the door, demeaning himself in all things like a civil and well disposed turnspit. But notwithstanding his exemplary deportment he fell likewise under the ill report of the village, as being the familiar of the little man in black, and the evil spirit that presided at his incantations. The old hovel was considered as the scene of their unhallowed rites, and its harmless tenants regarded with a detestation, which their inoffensive conduct never merited. Though pelted and jeered at by the brats of the village, and frequently abused by their parents, the little man in black never turned to rebuke them, and his faithful dog, when wantonly assaulted, looked up wistfully in his master's face, and there learned a lesson of patience and forbearance.

The movements of this inscrutable being had long been the subject of speculation at Cockloft-hall, for its inmates were full as much given to *wondering* as their descendants. The patience with which he bore his persecutions, particularly surprised them—for patience is a virtue but little known in

the Cockloft family. My grandmother, who it appears was rather superstitious, saw in this humility nothing but the gloomy sullenness of a wizard, who restrained himself for the present, in hopes of midnight vengeance—the parson of the village, who was a man of some reading, pronounced it the stubborn insensibility of a stoick philosopher:—my grandfather, who, worthy soul, seldom wandered abroad in search of conclusions, took a data from his own excellent heart, and regarded it as the humble forgiveness of a christian. But however different were their opinions as to the character of the stranger, they agreed in one particular, namely, in never intruding upon his solitude; and my grandmother, who was at that time nursing my mother, never left the room, without wisely putting the large family bible in the cradle—a sure talisman, in her opinion, against witchcraft and necromancy.

One stormy winter night, when a bleak north-east wind moaned about the cottages, and howled around the village steeple, my grandfather was returning from club, preceded by a servant with a lantern. Just as he arrived opposite the desolate abode of the little man in black, he was arrested by the piteous howling of a dog which, heard in the pauses of the storm, was exquisitely mournful; and he fancied now and then, that he caught the low and broken groans of some one in distress. He stopped for some minutes, hesitating between the benevolence of his heart and a sensation of genuine delicacy, which in spite of his eccentricity he fully possessed—and which forbade him to pry into the concerns of his neighbours. Perhaps too, this hesitation might have been strengthened by a little taint of superstition; for surely, if the unknown had been

addicted to witchcraft, this was a most propitious night for his vagaries. At length the old gentleman's philanthropy predominated; he approached the hovel and pushing open the door—for poverty has no occasion for locks and keys—beheld, by the light of the lantern, a scene that smote his generous heart to the core.

On a miserable bed, with pallid and emaciated visage and hollow eyes—in a room destitute of every convenience—without fire to warm, or friend to console him, lay this helpless mortal who had been so long the terror and wonder of the village. His dog was crouching on the scanty coverlet, and shivering with cold. My grandfather stepped softly and hesitatingly to the bed side, and accosted the forlorn sufferer in his usual accents of kindness. The little man in black seemed recalled by the tones of compassion from the lethargy into which he had fallen; for, though his heart was almost frozen, there was yet one chord that answered to the call of the good old man who bent over him—the tones of sympathy. so novel to his ear, called back his wandering senses and acted like a restorative to his solitary feelings.

He raised his eyes, but they were vacant and haggard—he put forth his hand, but it was cold—he essayed to speak, but the sound died away in his throat—he pointed to his mouth with an expression of dreadful meaning, and, sad to relate! my grandfather understood that the harmless stranger, deserted by society, was perishing with hunger!—With the quick impulse of humanity he dispatched the servant to the hall for refreshment. A little warm nourishment renovated

him for a short time---but not long ; it was evident his pilgrimage was drawing to a close, and he was about entering that peaceful asylum, where "the wicked cease from troubling."

His tale of misery was short and quickly told ; infirmities had stolen upon him. heightened by the rigours of the season : he had taken to his bed without strength to rise and ask for assistance —"and if I had," said he, in a tone of bitter despondency, "to whom should I have applied ? I have no friend that I know of in the world !—the villagers avoid me as something loathsome and dangerous ; and here, in the midst of christians, should I have perished without a fellow-being to soothe the last moments of existence, and close my dying eyes, had not the howlings of my faithful dog excited your attention."

He seemed deeply sensible of the kindness of my grandfather, and at one time as he looked up into his old benefactor's face, a solitary tear was observed to steal adown the parched furrows of his cheek—poor outcast !—it was the last tear he shed ---but I warrant it was not the first by millions ! My grandfather watched by him all night. Towards morning he gradually declined, and as the rising sun gleamed through the window, he begged to be raised in his bed that he might look at it for the last time. He contemplated it for a moment with a kind of religious enthusiasm, and his lips moved as if engaged in prayer. The strange conjectures concerning him rushed on my grandfather's mind : "he is an idolator !" thought he, "and is worshipping the sun !"—He listened a moment and blushed at his own uncharitable suspicion---he was only engaged in the pious devotions of a christian. His simple orison being finished, the little

man in black withdrew his eyes from the east, and taking my grandfather's hand in one of his, and making a motion with the other, towards the sun—"I love to contemplate it," said he, "tis an emblem of the universal benevolence of a true christian—and it is the most glorious work of him, who is philanthropy itself!" My grandfather blushed still deeper at his ungenerous surmises; he had pitied the stranger at first, but now he revered him—he turned once more to regard him, but his countenance had undergone a change—the holy enthusiasm that had lighted up each feature had given place to an expression of mysterious import—a gleam of grandeur seemed to steal across his gothick visage, and he appeared full of some mighty secret which he hesitated to impart. He raised the tattered nightcap that had sunk almost over his eyes, and waving his withered hand with a slow and feeble expression of dignity.—"In me," said he, with laconick solemnity—"In me you behold the last descendant of the renowned Linkum Fidelius!" My grandfather gazed at him with reverence, for though he had never heard of the illustrious personage thus pompously announced, yet there was a certain black-letter dignity in the name, that peculiarly struck his fancy and commanded his respect.

"You have been kind to me," continued the little man in black, after a momentary pause, "and richly will I requite your kindness, by making you heir to my treasures! In yonder large deal box are the volumes of my illustrious ancestor, of which I alone am the fortunate possessor. Inherit them—ponder over them—and be wise!" He grew faint with the exertion he had made, and

sunk back almost breathless on his pillow. His hand, which, inspired with the importance of his subject, he had raised to my grandfather's arm, slipped from its hold and fell over the side of the bed, and his faithful dog licked it, as if anxious to soothe the last moments of his master, and testify his gratitude to the hand that had so often cherished him. The untaught caresses of the faithful animal were not lost upon his dying master—he raised his languid eyes—turned them on the dog, then on my grandfather, and having given this silent recommendation—closed them forever.

The remains of the little man in black, notwithstanding the objections of many pious people, were decently interred in the church-yard of the village, and his spirit, harmless as the body it once animated, has never been known to molest a living being. My grandfather complied as far as possible with his last request—he conveyed the volumes of Linkum Fidelius to his library—he pondered over them frequently—but whether he grew wiser the tradition doth not mention. This much is certain, that his kindness to the poor descendant of Fidelius, was amply rewarded by the approbation of his own heart, and the devoted attachment of the old turnspit, who transferring his affection from his deceased master to his benefactor, became his constant attendant, and was father to a long line of runty curs that still flourish in the family. And thus was the Cockloft library first enriched by the invaluable folioes of the sage LINKUM FIDELIUS.

LETTER

FROM MUSTAPHA RUB-A-DUB KELI KHAN,

To Asem Hacchem, principal slave-driver to his highness the bashaw of Tripoli.

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Though I am often disgusted, my good Asem, with the vices and absurdities of the men of this country, yet the women afford me a world of amusement. Their lively prattle is as diverting as the chattering of the red-tailed parrot; nor can the green-headed monkey of Timandi equal them in whim and playfulness. But, notwithstanding these valuable qualifications, I am sorry to observe they are not treated with half the attention bestowed on the before mentioned animals. These infidels put their parrots in cages and chain their monkeys; but their women, instead of being carefully shut up in harams and seraglioes, are abandoned to the direction of their own reason, and suffered to run about in perfect freedom, like other domestick animals:—this comes, Asem, of treating their women as rational beings and allowing them souls. The consequence of this piteous neglect may easily be imagined—they have degenerated into all their native wildness, are seldom to be caught at home, and at an early age take to the streets and highways, where they

rove about in droves, giving almost as much annoyance to the peaceable people, as the troops of wild dogs that infest our great cities, or the flights of locusts, that sometimes spread famine and desolation over whole regions of fertility.

This propensity to relapse into pristine wildness, convinces me of the untameable disposition of the sex, who may indeed be partially domesticated by a long course of confinement and restraint, but the moment they are restored to personal freedom, become wild as the young partridge of this country, which, though scarcely half hatched, will take to the fields and run about with the shell upon its back.

Notwithstanding their wildness, however, they are remarkably easy of access, and suffer themselves to be approached, at certain hours of the day, without any symptoms of apprehension; and I have even happily succeeded in detecting them at their domestick occupations. One of the most important of these consists in thumping vehemently on a kind of musical instrument, and producing a confused, hideous, and indefinable uproar, which they call the description of a battle—a jest, no doubt, for they are wonderfully facetious at times, and make great practise of passing jokes upon strangers. Sometimes they employ themselves in painting little caricatures of landscapes, wherein they will display their singular drollery in bantering nature fairly out of countenance—representing her tricked out in all the tawdry finery of copper skies, purple rivers, calico rocks, red grass, clouds that look like old clothes set adrift by the tempest, and foxy trees, whose melancholy foliage, drooping and curling most fantastically,

reminds me of an undressed periwig that I have now and then seen hung on a stick in a barber's window. At other times they employ themselves in acquiring a smattering of languages spoken by nations on the other side of the globe, as they find their own language not sufficiently copious to supply their constant demands, and express their multifarious ideas. But their most important domestick avocation is to embroider on satin or muslin, flowers of a non-descript kind, in which the great art is to make them as unlike nature as possible--or to fasten little bits of silver, gold, tinsel and glass, on long strips of muslin, which they drag after them with much dignity whenever they go abroad--a fine lady, like a bird of paradise, being estimated by the length of her tail.

But do not, my friend, fall into the enormous error of supposing, that the exercise of these arts is attended with any useful or profitable result--believe me, thou couldst not indulge an idea more unjust and injurious; for it appears to be an established maxim among the women of this country that a lady loses her dignity when she condescends to be useful; and forfeits all rank in society the moment she can be convicted of earning a farthing. Their labours therefore, are directed not towards supplying their household but in decking their persons, and--generous souls!--they deck their persons, not so much to please themselves, as to gratify others, particularly strangers. I am confident thou wilt stare at this, my good Asem, accustomed as thou ar to our eastern females, who shrink in blushing timidity even from the glances of a lover, and are so chary

of their favours that they even seem fearful of lavishing their smiles too profusely on their husbands Here, on the contrary, the stranger has the first place in female regard, and so far do they carry their hospitality, that I have seen a fine lady slight a dozen tried friends and real admirers, who lived in her smiles and made her happiness their study, merely to allure the vague and wandering glances of a stranger, who viewed her person with indifference and treated her advances with contempt ——By the whiskers of our sublime bashaw, but this is highly flattering to a foreigner! and thou mayest judge how particularly pleasing to one who is, like myself, so ardent an admirer of the sex. Far be it from me to condemn this extraordinary manifestation of good will—let their own countrymen look to that.

Be not alarmed, I conjure thee, my dear Asem, lest I should be tempted by these beautiful barbarians to break the faith I owe to the three-and-twenty wives from whom my unhappy destiny has perhaps severed me for ever—no, Asem; neither time nor the bitter succession of misfortunes that pursues me, can shake from my heart the memory of former attachments. I listen with tranquil heart to the strumming and prattling of these fair syrens—their whimsical paintings touch not the tender chord of my affections; and I would still defy their fascinations, though they trailed after them trains as long as the gorgeous trappings which are dragged at the heels of the holy camel of Mecca: or as the tail of the great beast in our prophet's vision, which measured three hundred and forty-nine leagues, two miles, three furlongs, and a hand's breadth in longitude.

The dress of these women is, if possible, more eccentrick and whimsical than their deportment, and they take an inordinate pride in certain ornaments which are probably derived from their savage progenitors.——A woman of this country, dressed out for an exhibition, is loaded with as many ornaments as a circassian slave when brought out for sale. Their heads are tricked out with little bits of horn or shell, cut into fantastick shapes, and they seem to emulate each other in the number of these singular baubles—like the women we have seen in our journeys to Aleppo, who cover their heads with the entire shell of a tortoise, and thus equipped are the envy of all their less fortunate acquaintance. They also decorate their necks and ears with coral, gold chains, and glass beads, and load their fingers with a variety of rings; though, I must confess, I have never perceived that they wear any in their noses—as has been affirmed by many travellers. We have heard much of their painting themselves most hideously, and making use of bear's-grease in great profusion; but this, I solemnly assure thee, is a misrepresentation civilization, no doubt, having gradually extirpated these nauseous practises. It is true, I have seen two or three of these females, who had disguised their features with paint; but then it was merely to give a tinge of red to their cheeks, and did not look very frightful—and as to ointment, they rarely use any now, except occasionally a little grecian oil for their hair, which gives it a glossy, greasy, and (as they think) very comely appearance. The last mentioned class of females, I take it for granted, have been but lately caught

and still retain strong traits of their original savage propensities.

The most flagrant and inexcuseable fault however, which I find in these lovely savages, is the shameless and abandoned exposure of their persons. Wilt thou not suspect me of exaggeration when I affirm—wilt thou not blush for them most discreet mussulman, when I declare to thee, that they are so lost to all sense of modesty as to expose the whole of their faces from the forehead to the chin, and that they even go abroad with their hands uncovered !—Monstrous indelicacy !—

But what I am going to disclose, will doubtless appear to thee still more incredible. Though I cannot forbear paying a tribute of admiration to the beautiful faces of these fair infidels, yet I must give it as my firm opinion that their persons are preposterously unseemly. In vain did I look around me on my first landing, for those divine forms of redundant proportions which answer to the true standard of eastern beauty—not a single fat fair one could I behold among the multitudes that thronged the streets ; the females that passed in review before me, tripping sportively along, resembled a procession of shadows, returning to their graves at the crowing of the cock.

This meagreness I at first ascribed to their excessive volubility ; for I have somewhere seen it advanced by a learned doctor, that the sex were endowed with a peculiar activity of tongue, in order that they might practise talking as a healthful exercise, necessary to their confined and sedentary mode of life. This exercise, it was natural to suppose, would be carried to great excess in a logocracy——"Too true" thought

I "they have converted, what was undoubtedly meant as a beneficent gift, into a noxious habit that steals the flesh from their bones and the roses from their cheeks—they absolutely talk themselves thin!"—judge then of my surprise when I was assured not long since, that this meagreness was considered the perfection of personal beauty, and that many a lady starved herself, with all the obstinate perseverance of a pious dervise——into a fine figure!——"Nay more," said my informer, "they will often sacrifice their healths in this eager pursuit of skeleton beauty, and drink vinegar, eat pickles and smoke tobacco to keep themselves within the scanty outlines of the fashion."——Faugh! Allah preserve me from such beauties, who contaminate their pure blood with noxious recipes; who impiously sacrafice the best gift of heaven, to a preposterous and mistaken vanity.—Ere long I shall not be surprised to see them scarring their faces like the negroes of Congo, flattening their noses in imitation of the Hottentots, or like the barbarians of Ab-al Ti-nar, distorting their lips and ears out of all natural dimensions. Since I received this information I cannot contemplate a fine figure, without thinking of a vinegar cruet; nor look at a dashing belle, without fancying her a pot of pickled cucumbers! What a difference, my friend, between these shades, and the plump beauties of Tripoli—what a contrast between an infidel fair one and my favourite wife, Fatima, whom I bought by the hundred weight, and had trundled home in a wheel-barrow!

But enough for the present; I am promised a faithful account of the arcana of a lady's toilette—

a complete initiation into the arts, mysteries, spells and potions, in short the whole chemical process by which she reduces herself down to the most fashionable standard of insignificance; together with specimens of the strait waistcoats, the lacings, the bandages and the various ingenious instruments with which she puts nature to the rack, and tortures herself into a proper figure to be admired.

Farewel, thou sweetest of slave drivers! the echoes that repeat to a lover's ear the song of his mistress, are not more soothing than tidings from those we love. Let thy answers to my letters be speedy; and never, I pray thee, for a moment cease to watch over the prosperity of my house, and the welfare of my beloved wives. Let them want for nothing, my friend; but feed them plentifully on honey, boiled rice and water gruel, so that when I return to the blessed land of my fathers (if that can ever be!) I may find them improved in size and loveliness, and sleek as the graceful elephants that range the green valley of Abimar.

Ever thine.

MUSTAPHA.

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